

the world falls by xxcaribbean

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Summary:

Surely Steve isn't as cunning as Billy.

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Author's Note:

based on the masquerade scene from the movie *labyrinth*.

They all sound like cackling hyenas, the mirage of guests laugh-drunk within the fantasy Billy's created. He hopes they thank him later, sweet gifts of praise for his kindness, but something tells him that despite his grace, the castle will be left in a chaotic mess anyway.

In elegant shades of pearly blue sequins, Billy adjusts his coat, rakes his fingers through soft curls, preening when they fall back into place. The music is a soft lullaby traipsing down the hall; it calls his name, and he's lucky no one demands his presence, that no one would willingly disturb him unless it was urgent. He only shows his face when he wants, and tonight is more than a special occasion.

His guest had taken a bite of the peach; the stupidity of the stragglers on the outskirts of town had won Billy this round, offered the fruit with little explanation, and the labyrinth's guest had taken it.

Billy thought his opposers would hinder his determination in keeping the wish he'd granted, even though the little fuck that'd been wished away—that Billy had taken back to his castle in mindful grief—never shut the fuck up.

It was more pride than anything else. Billy kept his promises, refused to revoke them because the stupid boy who'd made the deal with him, the Goblin King, felt a substantial amount of regret.

It would be no matter. The clock continues ticking, Billy flicking his gaze upon the hourglass, each grain of sand another second, a minute, an hour of time that lapses in his favor.

He clears his throat, tongue wetting the bottom of his lip in anticipation for what he might find.

Billy leaves his decadent room, wide double doors groaning as he

approaches them. The guards at each end of the hall stand stock still, but Billy notices the way their spines crack when they shift, their height inching taller when they witness his presence.

Through the hall and down a spiraling staircase, Billy takes the long way around. The music and rambunctious laughter bleeds through the walls, muffled but alight with joy Billy sneers at.

He takes these moments in stride—but mostly for himself; the quiet echos of his boots hitting the ground beat alongside the pounding of his heart. There's a sense of peace, tranquility brought through being alone. Billy doesn't have moments like these often, not when in charge of a kingdom.

Not when he's busy granting wishes no one is thankful for.

Dismissing the weariness of his duties, Billy approaches the ballroom. The doors are shut, sealed if he were being vindictive. Through the crack in the bottom of the door, he sees shadows dancing across the floor. Elegant steps and beautiful trim brushing ankles in a harmonious dance the people of his kingdom, and generations before him, have kept alive.

Billy snaps his fingers, feels magic pulse beneath his skin as it's unleashed, as the doors swing wide open, revealing his grand appearance. The musicians do not stop, fingers nimble and quick in picking up the rhythm, and while hundreds of beady eyes balk at the sight of him, they do not stop spinning.

They do not stop for Billy when the uptick of his smile transforms his features.

They do not stop when he joins the floor, a gentle sway in his step as he acknowledges his subjects with the bow of his head.

The room around him, just as he'd imagined and wished into being, is covered in tapestry. Ribbons fall from the ceiling, from the curvature of the windows, displaying the light of the setting sun, the houses that surround his castle.

He wanders through the crowd, slowly, feels the hum of music

lighten his body with every pluck of string. There's little to look at. Billy created it all, imagined it into existence, but the glitter and sparkle that decorates his home isn't what he's used to.

The castle hangs itself in tarnished gray bricks, dull in a way that drags eerie stories out of its visitors. Redecorating has never been a priority, but the glow in the room, the revelation of difference gives him a fresh breath of air, makes him itch in that familiar need of adrenaline.

It comes and goes in waves, usually when Billy leaves, granting wishes during the witching hour. The buzz from being drunk off of it is enough to fulfill the hungry need inside of him clawing for entertainment, for a life beyond the walls of the only place he's ever called home.

Billy isn't a masochist least the beast is drawn out of him, but he enjoys the sick anguish people posses when they're in his presence.

Like now, the crowd has no worries, but it doesn't mean they don't eye him with suspicion. Billy doesn't keep himself locked away in the tower unlike his father before him. He weaves in and out of town, through the castle, and throughout their lives like a guardian on the rocks of damnation. To possess magic is a rarity, a gift of ordnance his mother proclaimed he'd use wisely, but in times like this, when meager threats runs loose, his agitation may be felt for miles.

When Billy spots him across the room - that meager threat he's been toying with—his smile turns ravenous, outrageous, plucked right off the wall of emotions. Billy watches his guest stumble amongst the crowd with little elegance the night is reserved for.

Dolled up in a pretty little white number, ribbons in his hair, glitter melding with the high points of his cheekbones, Billy catches those brown, doe-eyes blinking back at him, swirls of black confusion clouding his vision.

Billy dips around a woman in a dress, hiding in plain sight.

Again, his guest stumbles, runs into another pair of dancers who block his path, apologies slipping from his tongue. Billy plays cat and

mouse, pacing the outskirts of the dance floor until he's caught under the gaze of the one man who's determination might be the death of him.

The music changes in between their dance, but the hiccup between the end and beginning doesn't phase Billy as he shuffles along the floor. Gathering his wits, he bows in front of a woman, chances taking her hand until she's in proper form.

Billy leads them around in slow circles, fingers curling into the small of her back. He thinks this is what the castle would've thrived on were his parents alive, finding a suitor for their son next in line for the thrown. The body before him is nothing more than a stunned woman, however, and his patience runs thin when her feet catch his, when his guest finally picks him out from the crowd.

Slick as a cave-dwelling snake, the tight hold on his elbow prevents him from moving. The low timber of a syrupy sweet vibrato fills his ear.

"May I have this dance?"

His partner bows out without a word, or maybe Billy blocks it out in favor of turning an arched brow towards the source of havoc his city has endured. Since this boy's appearance, whispers have grown stronger in the villages—all about the stranger from an otherworldly land, the one who's challenged Billy for all that he has.

As if he'd roll over for a human boy, Billy knows the final maze will snap them all into place again. The disruption will stop; the whispered rumors will cease to exist, and the only threat he'll have to worry about then is death.

Billy doesn't answer the question presented to him, but he does slip his hand into the warmth of another's. Steve shows no sign of hesitation in Billy's presence, hadn't the moment Billy proposed the labyrinth's game. It'd been accepted upon entry as Billy couldn't have an outsider from another world on goblin soil without reason, and Steve had all but asked so sweetly for Billy to undo the one thing he could never.

“I would tell you that you look like a dream, but you don’t even try to fit in.” Billy leads their dance because it’d be stupid of him not to, and for all of Steve’s gracelessness, it seems he’d saved the best for Billy. He glides where Billy takes him, light feet propelling them across the ballroom in a flight of hardened feelings.

“I’m not here to fit in.”

The unspoken reason falls short. Billy can’t—and certainly won’t—admit that his visitor doesn’t fit in because he’d snapped his fingers and led a rebellion. Billy’d twisted the arm of the goblin peasant who’d chosen Steve over the Goblin King, and that in itself, was treason.

There have been many moments Billy’s shown mercy; heavy is the hand that holds all the power, and he’d learned from the mistakes of his father.

Instead of pure punishment, he gave an ultimatum: present the fruit or die begging.

Under the swath of music, Billy hums along with it, regret pilfered by rational. No one claimed Billy had the upmost moral, but his convictions permeated the villages, not one to retract from a given command. Amusement flushes the apples of his cheeks, then, the perk of realization crossing his mind as his eyes scatter across weather-weary skin.

“But you do tonight,” he eventually replies, supple and soft, pressing forward until the pink of his lips brush against the shell of Steve’s ear.

He’d given him this, at the very least, when Billy felt the first bite of the peach, when he’d grinned wickedly from atop his throne. The special occasion called for much more than the tattered, lazy clothes Steve had been wearing since his arrival. The dusting of glitter across the boy’s cheeks fading down into the sharp line of his jaw, particles leaking across the broad width of his shoulders.

Billy knows the sequins on jacket rivals everyone’s clothes, however. What would a party he hosted be without his extravagance

shimmering in the light of the ball, of the waning sun, and certainly in the presence of a boy that looks way too good for Billy's blood-thirsty appetite?

"Is this you trying to impress me?" Steve asks after a quick pivot, surrounded by couples who refuse to leave the floor. They're the only two that don't wear a mask, and Billy knows the contemplation, the hesitation that comes with reading the room incorrectly. Born of purpose or just plain mishap is anyone's guess.

"Now why would I do a thing like that?" In the distance, Billy knows the hourglass is running. He doesn't need to see the grain of sand falling, falling, falling into the dunes below. It lives in his bloodstream, the challenge sealed in a pact between the labyrinth and he, and because he'd always been destined to be king, he'd made his fun in other ways, tested both of their limits, found riddles and games that sought to upend the status quo.

"The lengths you're taking to keep me from reaching the center is questionable," Steve replies, tilting his head. It makes Billy think twice—the illusion he created, the room torn between wasted time and abundance, flickers in his mind's eye.

Surely Steve isn't as cunning as Billy. He's tripped over himself enough times in the maze not to easily win the game Billy has set—unfair and to his favor as it may be.

"So much effort in keeping me here," Steve finishes, the corner of his mouth curved into a devilish smile. He's taken a page out of Billy's book, catches him off guard with the rotund implication, the double meaning read so blatantly clear.

"Is that what you think?" If anything, the flicker of hesitation won't show. The shadow of doubt remains to be seen anywhere near Billy's shoulders. "You won't solve it in time."

Steve scoffs, fingers gliding over the lapels of Billy's jacket. "I know you want me to take the easy way out," he says, voice weaving beautifully between the silvery notes of the music, "but I think you like that I'm here. When was the last time someone solved your puzzle?"

"They haven't," Billy insists, but the dread lurks slowly like an undulating pool, building into a crescendo the music won't hit tonight. He tells himself Steve doesn't know, couldn't know even if he tried, but Billy feels the lie in the back of his throat. The sweet tinge of the labyrinth speaking to him lets him know the truth.

"Because you trick them."

"Because they're stupid," Billy says, hissing his annoyance into the face of someone too smug for his liking. The air shifts, dancers staggering away from the unbridled king as hostility creeps into his bones. The familiarity of panic is comforting, but Billy breathes and continues hiding it behind the eclipse of his dignity.

"Tell me," Steve says, brown eyes unrelenting under the weight of Billy's stare. Their dance has slowed, untimed, uncalculated with the heart of the melody in the room. "Has anyone made it this far before? Do you always entice them with grand gestures?"

He'd grit his teeth if the moment allowed, but Billy's sure Steve would hear it under the guiding voice of susceptibility. "This isn't for you," he insists, except his voice caves—betrays him from the rot of spite that sinks his gut down to the floor beneath his feet.

His weakness shows through, just a slight in his demeanor. It's all Billy needs to know—needs to feel—to understand that his cruel intentions have been mocked, have been seen for the shortcomings they were.

Billy's grip loosens around Steve's because he thinks he can salvage what's left of his masterpiece. The hourglass is like a chiming clock ticking in his ear—if only he'd held out a little longer. Those few seconds that slip by are all Steve needs, and Billy feels the shift when he attempts pulling away.

Steve tugs Billy back into his orbit, knees knocking together from the force of his gesture. He smiles, not unkindly despite the hospitality he's been given, and then he pushes them both forward.

Billy only takes one step back—only to catch his fall, and that's enough to sway everything out of his favor. The room stops abruptly;

the labyrinth laughs deep within the recess of his mind, and Billy frowns when the light of the masquerade shifts into an unpleasant shade of blue.

“Isn’t it?” Steve’s brow shoot up, arrogance written across the lines of his face. The corners of his mouth curl into whimsical delight that far exceeds the wit Billy gave him credit for as heat rises up his neck, slow as a sloth yet burning like molten lava.

The insults Billy wants to bite out—canine teeth sharp as any knife—fail to hit their mark as Steve slinks away from him in the blink of an eye. He reaches, but brings nothing back, empty-handed in all the ways that fucking matter. Billy spins on his heel, searching for the only man in the room without a goddamn facade, with pretty, white ribbons tied in his hair and resilience tapered across the back of his hands from the slap Billy wasn’t expecting.

When Billy finds Steve across the room, he watches as he approaches the only mirror that encompasses the wall—the manifestation of his veneer, the reflection of the truth within the glass. Billy’s chest tightens with certainty, with questions that drag his mind through every obstacle he’d put in Steve’s path.

There’s no way he could’ve known. The fruit from the garden of eden had been plucked by his own hand, magic twisted into his core, through its veins until Billy was satisfied it’d been infected.

Steve fiddles with the sleeve of his jacket, glancing around until he spots what he’s looking for. Billy witnesses the impulse, the flair of inevitability that licks up Steve’s limbs.

Without a second thought, a white chair is chosen as the instrument—discarded, unused, now finding purpose. Steve lifts it into the air with ease, swings it directly at the mirror until it shatters, until the world shakes and upends—until Billy’s illusion is nothing more than wilted tapestries, broken streamers, ribbons, and the muted foundation of his castle.

The hanging clock in the tower chimes off in the distance. Steve has three hours left until he loses, but Billy doesn’t hold an ounce of threat—yet. He stares at the remains of the mirror, careening past

confused goblins wrapped in glittered clothing, until the reflection—in all its cracked glory—is gazing back at him.

Billy grins wide, a little manic. The image in the mirror waterfalls into another, to Steve who's found himself in the junkyard with nothing more than a scratch on his temple.

Reaching forward, Billy touches the mirror, tracing the lines of Steve's panicked face, such a far cry from the tenacity he'd shared with Billy. It leaves him cool, like running water over a heated burn—but Billy enjoys this, enjoys Steve and the persistence he brings.

Like a shark in the water, Billy loves the taste of resilience.

Of feistiness.

“If only I could keep you, too.”